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ASSYRIAN WARFARE IN THE SARGONID PERIOD

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THE primary question about Assyrian warfare in the Sargonid period, the constitution of the army, was long ago settled in its broader aspects by Manitius in two able articles of which the conclusions, as far as they go, stand largely unchallenged.¹ Manitius showed that numerically the greater part of the grand army of Assyria was composed of levies raised from the provinces, under the control of the provincial governors, but that there was also a central standing army, which included units drawn from conquered territory, maintained by the king as a safeguard against over-ambitious satraps.² As to the numbers concerned, Manitius pointed out that the forces under one governor alone comprised not less than 1500 cavalry and 20,000 archers,³ suggesting a potential grand army running into hundreds of thousands. This agrees with the fact that in major actions enemy casualties approaching two hundred thousand are claimed,⁴ which, even if exaggerated, do indicate the order of the number of troops engaged. Prisoners also are numbered in hundreds of thousands.⁵

Within the standing army special units, not necessarily of native Assyrians, served in a closer relationship with the king as Guards companies or as Bodyguards.⁶ There were, however, corresponding permanent units which were not attached to the king. Letters show that there were many contingents of troops of high mobility scattered about the empire under officials not recognizable as provincial governors,⁷ and these troops were certainly units of a professional army and not temporary local levies. Some such units were cavalry squadrons consisting of a hundred cavalrymen under a *rab kišir*;⁸ others were permanent garrisons in border outposts, particularly along the northern frontier:⁹ such units certainly in some cases included personnel of more than one racial group.¹⁰ There is no doubt that such units, on duties in the remoter parts of the empire, were permanent, since there are indications in letters that Assyrian forces might continue a siege action, or possibly occupy enemy towns, during the middle of winter.¹¹

¹ Z.A. (a.F.) XXIV (1910), pp. 97-149, 185-224.

² Manitius, *op. cit.*, 111; V.R., pl. 9, 125-8.

³ Manitius, *op. cit.*, 129.

⁴ I.R., pl. 43, 48.

⁵ O.I.P. II, p. 165, Col. I, 50-53.

⁶ Manitius, *op. cit.*, 135ff.

⁷ H.A.B.L. 170, rev. 12-14.

⁸ H.A.B.L. 273, rev. 2-5.

⁹ H.A.B.L. 197, rev. 5-16; *et passim*.

¹⁰ H.A.B.L. 685, rev. 19-23.

¹¹ H.A.B.L. 112, rev. 10-14, to be translated not as Waterman (R.C.A.E. I, *ad loc.*) but as "Since the cold is severe, shall we call a halt [*lit.* plant ourselves] at this point?"

In addition to these outlying or mobile units of the standing army which were clearly under the direct control of the central government, there were permanent forces distinct from these controlled by local governors. This is implied, for instance, in the annals of Esarhaddon. Esarhaddon says that the rebellious governor of the Sealands, the son of Marduk-apil-iddin, "did not send his emissary to me, nor enquire after my well-being. I heard of his evil deeds within Nineveh and was angry . . . I ordered my officials and the governors of adjacent territory against him, and he . . . heard of the coming of my forces and fled".¹² There was obviously no scope for Assyrian officials to enlist levies locally in such circumstances nor to be able to rely on them if they did, and they must have controlled sufficiently powerful standing forces both to mount an attack upon a neighbouring territory and at the same time to safeguard security in their own territory, where during an emergency of this sort the local population was likely to be unsettled.

None the less, the possibility of a general levy of the whole population certainly remained till the very end of the Assyrian empire. In one letter, for example, the governor of Uruk proposed to Ashurbanipal a general muster of Akkad against the rebellious Gambulu tribe, if milder measures failed.¹³ Also, it is well known that in his first march to Egypt Ashurbanipal enlisted in his armies the forces of twenty-two kings of the Syrian coastal region.¹⁴

There is one further indication that the Assyrian military forces had a substantial standing army as their nucleus. This indication is the length of the campaign season, for there are several references to the fact that the circumstances which dictated the close of a campaign was nothing else than the onset of inclement weather. Whereas in Israel at the time of David we find a specific reference to a campaign season,¹⁵ in the Assyrian annals we find that there was no month in which the army might not be under arms. This is beyond question, since in more than one instance we read of a campaign not being broken off until Tebet or Shabaṭ,¹⁶ and elsewhere of the army setting out from its base in Aššur in Shabaṭ,¹⁷ or the king being assured by his astrologer in the middle of Tebet that it was a propitious time for an attack on the west.¹⁸ Anciently the situation in Assyria must have been similar to that in Israel, the army being mustered in the month of Tammuz (late June), that is, when work on the corn harvest was complete; but by Sargonid times this had ceased to be the general practice. The very fact that Sargon comments on the date of his campaign in a particular case by reference to an ancient text in which it

¹² R. Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons*, p. 47, Episode 4, II 49-55. (My rendering differs slightly from that of Professor Borger.)

¹³ *H.A.B.L.* 269, rev. 5-11.

¹⁴ *V.R.*, pl. 1, 68-74.

¹⁵ 2 *Samuel* xi 1.

¹⁶ *I.R.*, pl. 43, 42. R. Borger, *op. cit.*, p. 44, Episode 2, I 66, shows Esarhaddon undertaking a campaign in Šabaṭ, but at the same time accepting that the weather to be expected in that month would normally make campaigning undesirable.

¹⁷ Sidney Smith, *The first campaign of Sennacherib* p. 34, *B.M.* 113203, 19.

¹⁸ *H.A.B.L.* 137, obv. 6-17.

is said that Nin-igi-ku Lord of Wisdom had prescribed the month of Tammuz "for the assembling of the army, for making the camp complete"¹⁹ shows that this month was no longer recognized as having a regular connection, based on economic considerations, with the beginning of the campaign season.²⁰

That there was permanently under arms a considerable striking force, distinct from the Guards companies which always accompanied the king, is also shown by the statement of Esarhaddon in connection with his suppression of the rebellion at the beginning of his reign. At the death of his father in mid-winter he was in command of an army in the west, apparently in winter quarters. It is clear, however, that that army was in a state of twenty-four-hour preparedness for action, for Esarhaddon specifically states that, having received a favourable "yes" from the gods, he did not delay a day, he did not review his army nor inspect his horses or equipment, nor heap up provisions for the campaign.²¹

This perennial preparedness of Assyria for immediate military action is in direct contrast to the situation found with some other of the major contemporary states. When Umman-menanu of Elam, for instance, was induced to supply military assistance in the Babylonian action against Assyria, the Elamite had first to assemble his army and muster his camp,²² the forces at his disposal being apparently only the contingents raised *ad hoc* from a large number of dependent provinces and vassals.²³ (However, by the time of Ashurbanipal Elam also had at least the nucleus of a standing army.)²⁴

The speed of advance of the Assyrian army in normal conditions can be calculated with fair accuracy, since at the beginning of the eighth campaign of Sargon it is clear that the army reached the Lower Zab from Calah in two days march or less.²⁵ The nearest probable point of crossing on the route to Zamua (Sulaimaniya province) is about fifty miles as the crow flies from Calah, giving a marching distance of about sixty miles over fairly easy country, or a speed of thirty miles a day. When one recalls that Layard sometimes rode up

¹⁹ *T.C.L.* III, pl. I, 7.

²⁰ The Urañian army appears to have begun its campaigns in Nisan; see *H.A.B.L.* 492, obv. 4-13.

²¹ R. Borger, *op. cit.*, pp. 43 f., Episode 2, I 60-65.

²² *C.A.D.*, D, p. 128, takes the verb here (*O.I.P.* II, p. 181, Col. V, 35) in the sense of "to break camp", but the succeeding lines show that the army was not yet called up, still less in camp awaiting the order to move.

²³ *O.I.P.* II, p. 181, Col. V, 35-52.

²⁴ *V.R.*, pl. 6, 86-90.

²⁵ *T.C.L.* III, pl. I, 9-10. A very different figure has been given for Sargon's rate of advance. Mr. Rigg, in *J.A.O.S.* LXII (1942), 132, makes the statement that "it took three days for the front of [Sargon's] column to accomplish something over thirty miles". This statement involves two errors.

Firstly, the nearest point of the Lower Zab to Calah is, according to the War Office maps, forty-four miles away, not thirty, whilst the distance along the mule track which most nearly follows the shortest line (not the route likely to have been used since it would have taken Sargon too far south) is fully fifty miles. Secondly, Sargon did not take three days to reach the Lower Zab. It was on the third day that he commended his objective to Enlil and Ninlil and then crossed the Lower Zab. No intelligent commander is likely to break camp, cross a defensive river and strike off into potentially hostile country just before nightfall, and the ceremonial oath by the gods, followed by the crossing of the Lower Zab, must have been made on the morning of the third day, so that Sargon's forces must have set up camp on the northern side of the river on the second day.

to a hundred miles a day in similar terrain, it is clear that this was very reasonable for cavalry, though it may have represented a feat of endurance for the infantry and accompanying transport.

The Assyrian army, like every other, marched on its stomach, and for its efficient operation there must have been an efficient commissariat. Normally the army set out with basic rations, mainly (as one would expect) of corn, this being clear from the use of the verb *šapāku* for preparing the *šidit girri* (provisions for the campaign).²⁶ Corn and straw were also taken for the horses, at least in territory such as south Babylonia where they could not live off the land.²⁷ Normally the supplies for the soldiers would be meted out in a daily issue, for when granary towns were captured, it was mentioned that as an exceptional treat the king could allow his troops to eat unrationed measure.²⁸ Where possible the army lived off the territory through which it was passing, and the availability of such local means of subsistence must frequently, in the later stages of a campaign, have dictated the choice of route, as von Clausewitz points out as a general principle of war.²⁹ When the army passed through territory constituting part of Assyria or directly administered by Assyrian officials, it was the responsibility of the local Assyrian governors to provide rations for the army; this is clear from Sargon's comment upon Ullusunu of Mannai-land that "he poured out flour and wine to feed my army just like my officials and governors of the land of Assyria".³⁰

The formal order of march of the grand Assyrian army, at least in the time of Sargon in terrain where the army was not liable to ambush, was, first, the standards of the gods, presumably accompanied by religious functionaries, then the king, accompanied by his chariotry, cavalry and front-line infantry, then the great mass of the levies, and finally the transport bringing up the rear.³¹ Amongst the auxiliaries there were engineers who might be required to do anything from making bridges across streams or cutting roads through mountains to building ramps (of timber frames with filling of earth and stone) for siege warfare.³² Such specialists were presumably part of the central standing army. Other auxiliaries certainly included diviners, scribes, interpreters, and intelligence officers.

Such a procession, headed by the imperial standards, was, in both the literal and the metaphorical sense, a showing of the flag, and it seems possible that this constituted a strategic, or political, aspect of Assyrian warfare which is sometimes overlooked. Had more attention been paid to such strategic aspects of Assyrian warfare, some of the indignation voiced by modern commentators against Assyrian atrocities might have been seen to be unjustified. There are

²⁶ Borger, *op. cit.*, p. 44, Episode 2, I 65.

²⁷ III R., pl. 12, Slab 2, 22.

²⁸ T.C.L. III, pl. IX, 186, pl. X, 197, pl. XIII, 274.

²⁹ *On War*, [translated by J. J. Graham, new and revised edition, by F. N. Maude, 3 vols., London, 1940], vol. 2, Bk. v, Ch. vi, p. 34.

³⁰ T.C.L. III, pl. III, 52-53.

³¹ T.C.L. III, pl. I, 14, pl. II, 25-26.

³² T.C.L. III, pl. II, 23-24, pl. XVI, 329-330; Borger, *op. cit.*, p. 104, Gbr. II, Col. I, 37; *H.A.B.L.* 100, rev. 14-15.

frequent references in the Assyrian annals to the pouring out upon the enemy of *šaburratu*, *namurratu*, or *hattu* by the Assyrian king, or the covering of the enemy land by *burbašu* or by the king's *puluhtu*, and I would maintain that this represented a definite conscious use by the Assyrians not of terrorism for sadistic purposes, but of psychological warfare. Sennacherib refers indeed to the fact that although he had gone to the trouble of making a demonstration against Elam, the untimely death of the Elamite king within three months put on the throne a younger brother who lacked the intelligence to draw the appropriate conclusion from this reminder of Assyrian military might.³³ The unexpectedness and indeed unreasonableness of further Elamite interference in Babylonian affairs after the Assyrian demonstration is emphasized by the fact that the young Elamite king's lack of intelligence is explicitly referred to three times within less than thirty lines.³⁴ The more normal and expected consequence of Assyrian policy is shown in the incident in which Ashurbanipal devastated a district of the Mannaeen land and poured out *šaqqummatu*, as a result of which the anti-Assyrian Mannaeen ruler was assassinated by his own subjects and replaced by his pro-Assyrian son.³⁵ Sargon states explicitly that his victories had a propaganda aspect to them. After his defeat of the combined forces of Urartu and Zikirtu, he says: "the rest of the people, who had fled to save their lives, I let go free to glorify the victory of Aššur my lord."³⁶ Some of these poor wretches died from exposure in the mountains, but others reached home, where their terrifying account of the devastating striking power of the Assyrian forces had the required effect. Sargon records: "Their leaders, men who understood battle and who had fled before my weapons, drew nigh to them covered with the venom of death, and recounted to them the glory of Aššur, . . . so that they became like dead men."³⁷

This view of the function of Assyrian psychological warfare is in accordance with an observation made by Professor W. von Soden, namely, that in the palace of Ashurnasirpal it is only in the great hall which probably served as an audience chamber that scenes of warfare predominated in the friezes, serving to reinforce in the minds of visiting rulers and dignitaries the memory of Assyrian military might; in the other rooms of the palace the scenes were mostly of religious topics or of court life.³⁸ Furthermore, it is clear that the punishments inflicted upon rebel leaders, such as the flaying of Bagdatti,³⁹ who had murdered the pro-Assyrian chieftain of the Mannaeans, were not carried out merely as acts of sadism. It is specifically stated in the case of Bagdatti that the mutilated body was exposed to the population at large: for parallels making clear the political purpose of showing a dead opponent to the population at large one need go no further back in time than the most

³³ *O.I.P.* II, pp. 179 ff., Col. V, 11-16, 37-41.

³⁴ *O.I.P.* II, pp. 179 ff., Col. V, 15, 33-34, 40.

³⁵ *V.R.*, pl. 3, 2-17.

³⁶ *T.C.L.* III, pl. VII, 146.

³⁷ *T.C.L.* III, pl. IX, 175-6.

³⁸ *Herrscher im alten Orient*, pp. 83 f.

³⁹ A. G. Lie, *The inscriptions of Sargon II King of Assyria*, Part I: *The Annals*, p. 14, 83.

recent revolutions in both Turkey and Iraq, in which the executed bodies of Mr. Menderes and General Kassim were shown as widely as possible in newspapers and on television. The treatment of a captured vassal who had rebelled against Assyria was not a matter of mere vindictive torture, but was directed to making a public example and giving a warning by demonstrating what happened to delinquent ringleaders. Ashurbanipal mentions in a letter that his grandfather Sennacherib had given the weight in silver for the body of the Babylonian usurper Shuzubu, and that he himself would give the weight in gold for the body of another rebel, alive or dead.⁴⁰ The latter point is significant: it was the publicity and not the inflicting of pain or punishment which was the main Assyrian purpose in the treatment of captive rebel leaders.

Another strategic aspect of Assyrian warfare at this period concerns the attitude to the annexation of territory. It appears that the mere annexation of territory was not generally a primary objective. It is generally recognized that Esarhaddon made a strategic error, as well as a departure from traditional policy, in his annexation of Egypt; certainly his predecessors were concerned primarily with political rather than military control of the territory of a conquered adversary or vassal. This is obvious in practice, and the principle is explicitly stated in an unpublished Nimrud letter.⁴¹ The king, probably Tiglath-Pileser after the Ukin-zer rebellion, writes to someone who is most probably to be taken as a princeling over one of the Chaldaean or Aramaean tribes. The Babylonian *milieu* of the letter is indicated by the fact that it employs Babylonian script and even Babylonian grammatical forms, whilst that the addressee was, from the point-of-view of protocol, nominally an equal of the king of Assyria is shown by the letter not having the usual form of an *abit šarri*, but beginning in the Old Babylonian manner: *ana KUR.GAL-šum-iškun qibima umma šarrumma*. The gist of the letter is contained in the following words: *Marduk-mar-našir ana muhbi (mat) Aššur(KI) ta-dur-ma u-pal-laḫ-ma la ta-pa-laḫ-ma ni-qut-ti la ta-raš-šu ana išdi ša mati-ku pu-ut-ku na-ša-ta*, "You have been frightened of Marduk-mar-našir concerning Assyria. He does indeed cause fear. You are not to fear and you are not to have any anxiety. You bear the responsibility for the stability of your land." It seems likely from the context that Marduk-mar-našir was an Assyrian representative at the court of KUR.GAL-šum-iškun, who had been over-vigorous in putting the fear of Aššur into that petty ruler. The Assyrian king, however, sought to reassure the Babylonian, as much by his manner of address as by his message, making it quite clear that provided the petty ruler followed a pro-Assyrian policy, the actual control of his territory remained with him, direct annexation not being a primary Assyrian intention.⁴² Again, Esarhaddon refers to Bel-iqiša, chief of the Gambulu tribe, upon whom *hattu* fell, so that he voluntarily made

⁴⁰ *H.A.B.L.* 292, rev. 2-11.

⁴¹ ND.2435.

⁴² See also *H.A.B.L.* 571, in which Sargon promises to treat Babylon with leniency upon its surrender after the usurping reign of Marduk-apil-iddin.

submission to Assyria. There was no question of Esarhaddon occupying his territory, but Bel-iqiša received Assyrian technical aid in fortifying his capital, which he garrisoned as an outpost against Elam.⁴³

In most cases the tactical details of Assyrian engagements are very obscure, but in a few instances we have enough information to enable us to comment upon the tactical aspects of a battle. One of the most interesting and informative is the occasion in his eighth campaign upon which Sargon engaged the joint forces of Urartu and Zikirtu. Sargon does not disguise the fact that just before he made contact with the opposing forces his own troops were in bad morale. He says of his troops: "I could not give ease to their weariness, I could not give (them) water to drink, I could not set up the camp and I could not fix the defence of the headquarters. I could not direct my advance-guards (with the result that) I could not gather them in to me; my units of the right and left had not returned to my side; and I could not await the rear-guard."⁴⁴ This passage is, of course, very instructive as to the formation maintained by Sargon's army when contact with the enemy was thought to be imminent. A further detail which may be gleaned from another passage is that men of front line infantry units, the troops which the king called *šab taḥāzi ālikūt idiya*, might serve as scouts or snipers, spreading out over the hills above both wings to give security over a large area.⁴⁵ The provincial levies within the army were commanded by their own governors, though the latter were under the immediate tactical orders of the king.⁴⁶ Whether such levies were disposed according to weapon or geography is not clear. Probably in the levies there was little conflict between the conceptions of division by place of origin and division by type of weapon, since the type of weapon used was often a national characteristic. In the friezes one does see what appear to be mixed infantry units of archers, slingers and spearmen,⁴⁷ but if this is not simply a piece of artistic economy, the units concerned probably belonged to the standing army.

In the decisive battle of the eighth campaign of Sargon, Ursa of Urartu and Metatti of Zikirtu drew up their battle line in a defile of the mountains,⁴⁸ in difficult terrain at a point where it was correctly foreseen that Sargon would find difficulty in maintaining tactical control over the whole of his forces. Although this doubtless seemed to Ursa an excellent place at which to catch the Assyrian army, it was in fact an extremely grave tactical error on his part to engage his whole army in a defensive battle in a mountain defile. Von Clausewitz goes to great length to point out "how unfavourable mountain ground is to the defensive in a decisive battle, and, on the other hand, how much it favours the assailant. . . . From the powerful resistance which small

⁴³ Borger, *op. cit.*, pp. 52 f., Episode 13, A, III 71-83.

⁴⁴ T.C.L. III, pl. VII, 129-130.

⁴⁵ T.C.L. III, pl. II, 25.

(2792)

⁴⁶ S. Smith, *The first campaign of Sennacherib*, p. 34, B.M. 113203, 20.

⁴⁷ C. J. Gadd, *The Stones of Assyria*, pl. 16.

⁴⁸ T.C.L. III, pl. VI, 111.

bodies of troops may offer in a mountainous country, common opinion becomes impressed with an idea that all mountain defence is extremely strong. . . . We do not hesitate to put ourselves in direct opposition to such an opinion. . . . Very far therefore from seeing a refuge for the defensive in a mountainous country, when a decisive battle is sought, we should rather advise a General in such a case to avoid such a field by every possible means."⁴⁹ Von Clausewitz goes on to point out in detail the grave disadvantage at which a defensive army (that is, a large body of troops as distinct from small outposts) stands in a mountain territory. It is interesting to notice that Metatti of Zikirtu by himself had refused to give battle in such circumstances and had withdrawn before Sargon's advance, sending his cavalry and front line infantry to join Ursa.⁵⁰ To slow down Sargon's advance he had left outposts in the passes,⁵¹ quite in accordance with the principles laid down by von Clausewitz. It would appear that Metatti was a better general than Ursa.

It is perhaps not fanciful to suppose that the confident manner in which, in the passage following the statement of the disposition of the forces of Urartu and Zikirtu, Sargon boasts of his own qualities and calls upon the gods,⁵² reflects the fact that he was not slow to recognize the advantage at which Ursa's tactical folly had placed him, and that this fully outweighed the disadvantage of his own confessed breakdown of communications. When Sargon came upon the forces of Ursa, his main attack was headed by Sargon's personal squadron of cavalry, although Sargon himself, presumably for ceremonial reasons, was in a light chariot.⁵³ Although one scholar has taken the view that Assyrian cavalry could not use the bow on horseback,⁵⁴ Sargon says quite explicitly that the Assyrian forces wrought havoc upon the enemy *ina uṣṣi mulmulli*⁵⁵ ("by arrows and javelins"), and since the Assyrian cavalry was engaged at close quarters with the Urartian forces, this certainly cannot have been due to Assyrian infantry archers shooting over the heads of their own cavalry, quite apart from the fact that Sargon specifically mentioned that he had lost tactical control of his infantry, so that they were not engaged at all in the early part of the action. (It may be pointed out incidentally that the main objective of the Assyrian mounted archers seems to have been to immobilize the enemy chariotry, by shooting down the horses rather than the men; this principle was of course still followed up to the first Great War.) Sargon's attack upon a large army, deprived of the possibility of manoeuvre by its position in a mountain defile, had precisely the effect which von Clausewitz shows it is always bound to have.

Sargon's account of the battle indicates that the two armies, of Urartu and

⁴⁹ *Op. cit.*, vol. 2, Bk. vi, Ch. xvi, pp. 245-6.

⁵⁰ *T.C.L.* III, pl. IV, 80-pl. V, 85.

⁵¹ *T.C.L.* III, pl. V, 86.

⁵² *T.C.L.* III, pl. VI, 112-124.

⁵³ *T.C.L.* III, pl. VI, 132-3.

⁵⁴ A. Salonen, *Hippologica Accadica*, p. 158, n. 2. This point has been refuted by C. J. Gadd, *B.S.O.A.S.*, 1958, p. 182. See also B.M. 124926 (British Museum, Assyrian Basement), which shows a running battle between archers mounted on camels and horses.

⁵⁵ *T.C.L.* III, pl. VII, 139.

Zikirtu, though fighting alongside each other, remained separate units of command, and were probably, if too much is not being read into the phraseology, quite differently organized. Ursa's army, though it certainly contained levies, was, the terminology suggests, based on a standing army, which Ursa, surrounded by his courtiers and aides, commanded from a central headquarters.⁵⁶ The army of Zikirtu, on the other hand, was apparently nothing but a collection of local levies, which were disposed on a territorial basis, vassals fighting alongside their overlord. Sargon made a direct attack upon Ursa's headquarters, cut up the company of infantry defending it, and forced the surrender of the cavalry, which was clearly immobilized for lack of space to manoeuvre.⁵⁷ The surrender of the cavalry underlines the bad generalship of Ursa. Sargon specifically says that the Urartian army had the best-trained horses in the world. "As to the people who live in that area in the land of Urartu, . . . their like does not exist for skill with cavalry horses. The foals, young steeds born in [the king's] spacious land, which they rear for his royal contingents and catch yearly, until they are taken to the land of Subi and their quality(?) becomes apparent, will never have had anyone straddling their backs; yet in advancing, wheeling, retreating, or battle disposition, they are never seen to break out of control."⁵⁸

With the Urartian army completely demoralised, Sargon turned to Zikirtu. Here the different formation required different tactics. Sargon states *Metatti Zikirtaya adi šarrāni ša limetišu puḫuršun ušamqitma uparrira kišrišun*.⁵⁹ *puḫuršun ušamqit* is taken to mean "I broke up their grouping", the sense being that Sargon broke up the battle formation by separating the tributaries from their overlord, and then *uparrira kišrišun*, proceeded to smash up the disorganized units piecemeal.

The defeat of the Zikirtian and Urartian armies need not however have meant the final defeat of Urartu, a view for which one may adduce von Clausewitz again: "After the victory [in the mountains] ensues a state of defence for the conqueror, during which the mountainous ground must be as disadvantageous to the assailant as it was to the defensive, and even more so. If the war continues, . . . if the people take up arms, this reaction will gain strength from a mountainous country."⁶⁰

It was at this point in the eighth campaign that the psychological aspects of Assyrian warfare showed their soundness. Sargon, now deep in hostile territory between Zikirtu and Urartu, might well have been exposed to crippling attrition from guerilla warfare. In fact, however, so effective was Sargon's propaganda, that, as a result of the terrifying reports which preceded the

⁵⁶ T.C.L. III, pl. VII, 137-9.

⁵⁷ T.C.L. III, pl. VII, 138.

⁵⁸ T.C.L. III, pl. VIII, 170-pl. IX, 173. The final phrase, *šupur šimittu*, would usually be taken to refer to chariot teams, but the passage is specifically speak-

ing about *pitballā* (cavalry horses), for which reason I take *šimittu* here to mean "harness" in general and not "chariot-yoke".

⁵⁹ T.C.L. III, pl. VII, 141.

⁶⁰ *Op. cit.*, vol. 2, Bk. vi, Ch. xvi, p. 255.

Assyrian army, not only did the civil population abstain from harrying tactics against Sargon, but even, in a number of cases, the very garrisons of Urartian towns are reported to have lost their nerve and taken to the hills.⁶¹ In the absence of mass media of communication, terror, spreading from village to village and town to town, was the only means of softening up an enemy population in advance. The methods of Assyrian psychological warfare may be distasteful to us in modern times, but one need go no further than the eighth campaign of Sargon to see that it had a high military value, and did not spring from some sadistic element peculiar to the Assyrian character.⁶²

⁶¹ *T.C.L.* III, pl. XI, 214, restored from *K.A.H.* II, no. 141.

⁶² Some of the most respected amongst my colleagues, whilst conceding all the Assyriological facts I have adduced, strongly deny my conclusion. There are two principal arguments which I have encountered in opposition to my view. The first is the straight-forward denial that in the perpetration of atrocities any other national group (the Mongols and Nazis being excepted by some) has ever equalled or approached the Assyrians in the extent or the brutality of its activities. I am unable to accept that this accords with the facts. In the writings of Layard and his contemporaries one can find from nineteenth century Persia, Turkey and Egypt parallels, some of them on a considerable scale, for almost every atrocity the Assyrians ever thought of. As one instance we find the Wazir of the Shah building the bodies of three hundred living rebels into a fortress wall, their heads protruding to ensure them the longest possible agony before death (Sir A. H. Layard, *Early adventures in Persia, Susiana, and Babylonia*, 1894, p. 117). Among twentieth century people at war, the perpetration of atrocities has by no means been limited to Nazis, and a little research amongst combatants will reveal plentiful instances from the forces of most nations, great and small: specific examples that I have noted include the murder of prisoners, torture to secure information, cannibalism, rape of women, the massacre of all the women and children of an enemy village,

and mutilation of the genitals of enemy dead; whilst castration of a prisoner, blinding and burning to death could be added, though the perpetrators in the last three cases were not technically soldiers. Admittedly, in most (though not all) of these cases the numbers involved were small, but it is perhaps neither cynical nor irrelevant to point out that in the circumstances of modern warfare opportunities for such behaviour are remarkably limited.

The other argument, whilst accepting that all peoples have in the heat of war been guilty of atrocities, suggests that the frankness with which the Assyrians recorded such activities convicts them of having taken actual overt pleasure, as other peoples did not and do not, in the contemplation of human suffering. This is an argument which could only be adequately discussed by a psychologist, but I would point out that in modern society there is an apparently insatiable demand for accounts or pictures of human suffering (whether real or fictitious). For references to American publications, with sales of scores of millions a month, containing pictorial representations of atrocities far worse than anything recorded by the Assyrians, see F. Wertham, *The seduction of the innocent*, passim. Also relevant is perhaps the prominence (presumably reflecting popular demand) given in newspapers to such tragedies as children being burnt to death. The popularity of films and television programmes involving the most brutal violence also suggests that modern man enjoys the representation of human suffering no less than did the Assyrians.